

For Immediate Release

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Help Wanted: MDOC Needs 500 Correctional Officers

JACKSON – The Mississippi Department of Corrections needs 500 officers so that it can continue to fulfill its public safety mission, provide court-ordered programs and expand its re-entry efforts.

“The department’s ability to be an active and successful participant in additional criminal justice reform in this state will be affected by staffing,” Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said. “Therefore, considering the staffing shortage we consistently cite, hiring more correctional officers is critical. Within that conversation, we have made a salary realignment for correctional officer a cornerstone of our funding request to the Legislature.”

Commissioner Hall is asking lawmakers for a realignment to move the current entry pay for a correctional officer from \$24,903, the lowest in the country, to between \$28,000 and \$31,000 to address the critical shortage. Staffing – at **1,950 employees** – is at its lowest in a system with 19,233 incarcerated persons today.

Gov. Phil Bryant also is asking the Legislature to allocate funds to raise correctional officer’s pay. His budget recommendation includes \$7.1 million for a pay raise and \$3 million to hire more officers, program coordinators, and case managers.

“While hiring more correctional officers is critical to addressing our understaffing needs, support personnel, such as case managers and program coordinators, is just as integral to criminal justice reform,” Commissioner Hall said. “A pay increase alone won’t solve our critical staffing shortage, but it will definitely help. We need the Legislature to partner with us in getting more officers.”

To attract applicants, the department is using various strategies, including advertisement through radio, television, newspaper, Facebook, the MDOC and state Personnel Board websites, and the MDOC Job line. Employees are sharing with churches and civic groups and at job fairs and on school campuses. There are recruitment signs along the roads in the vicinity of various facilities.

“We have a sign at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) and one near the Flowood Community Work Center/Restitution Center,” said Human Resources Director Sharon Pepper. “We are also looking at bringing back the magnetic signs for MDOC vehicles.”

In addition to the two interview and screening sessions per month at its facilities, the MDOC restructured its academy training programs to four weeks Monday-Friday with no overnight requirement at each of the three state prisons. Previously, training was eight weeks only at the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

Applicants must have no felony or domestic violence charge, a valid driver’s license, pass a background check, and be at least 21 years old.

Interview and screening sessions are held on the first Saturday and second or third Wednesday of each month at CMCF in Pearl the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) at Parchman, and South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) at Leakesville. Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2019, is the next academy hiring date.

Applicants should bring their Social Security card, driver’s license, a copy of high school diploma or G.E.D., copy of selective service registration (for males age 21-25), and five non-family member character references.

The screening process includes an interview, math test, report writing exercise, physical agility test, background check, and polygraph and drug tests. Comfortable clothing and tennis shoes are recommended.